

Cette perspective nouvelle des femmes explique, peut-être, le fait que les écrivains soient absents du chambardement de la langue par les écrivaines françaises, québécoises et dans une moindre mesure, par les Américaines et les Canadiennes-anglaises. En Colombie-britannique, je pense à Betsy Warland, à Daphne Marlatt. Au Manitoba, je connais Lal Sarson, Milly Giesbrecht.

Les femmes viennent à l'écriture comme elles sont venues au monde. Nous avons parlé le Verbe du Père... faute de mieux; maintenant que nous savons qu'une langue différente existe, nous l'apprenons, nous la prenons. Et le monde littéraire ne s'en portera que mieux!

Je terminerai ma communication en citant Maara Haas qui, incidemment sera publiée par Lilith Publications en mars prochain:

"It's very important to have a woman's input because there's a decline in our literature. Women have fresh minds and concepts from their own experience, which has never been told in that way. For the revitalization of literature and for the sanity of those women, it's important to encourage them."

Women Writers' Contribution to Language

JANICK BELLEAU

I thought it best, at least for myself, to illustrate my subject by giving examples of various writers' works: one American who adapted the language to her Being as well as francophone writers who have defined and are currently polishing a language which is their own.

You probably know or have heard about these writers: the francophile Gertrude Stein, the French Marguerite Duras, and the québécoises Denise Boucher and Nicole Brossard.

Gertrude Stein:

The first writer who has expressed, black on white, the language of surrealistic painting. In lieu of painting, she has put painting into words. A visual body of work. Full of images and nuances. Bursting with forbidden fruits. Innuendos such as:

"... As to be all of it as to be a wife as a wife has a cow, a love story, all of it as to be all of it as a wife all of it as to be as a wife has a cow a love story, all of it as a wife has a cow as a wife has a cow a love story."

(*As a wife has a cow a love story*, 1926)

Perhaps you are familiar with the story of Stein's editor A.J. Fifield. He sent her a rejection slip in a style she had no trouble appreciating, though the content might have bothered her:

"I am only one, only one, only one... Being only one, having only one pair of eyes, having only one time, having only one life, I cannot read your MS three or four times. Not even one time. Only one look, only one look is enough. Hardly one copy would sell here. Hardly one. Hardly one."

(*The Front Matter*, The Banff publishing workshop, 1985).

Whoever said editors were ignorant of the true nature of writers? Fortunately for us, Gertrude Stein's esoterism did not deter Bennett from becoming her first publisher.

Janick Belleau

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Denise Boucher:

"Literature, in contrast to a media supposedly faithful to reality, guides us to a completely different fidelity: fidelity of our respective truths, the only ones which may provide access to a story's truth which we will always miss because they were unwritten."

(Free translation from *Retailles*)

Women have written. Women are writing. Women will continue writing.

It reminds me of Denise Boucher one autumn evening of 1979 in Ottawa. This controversial author of *The Fairies are Thirsty* was talking with us, a group of university women in the process of becoming feminists, and stated that "even men who have written more than us have never broken any hardcast literary rules. Everything still needs to be said." In spite of the silence. In spite of censorship.

And Denise Boucher knew of what she was speaking that night. You may recall that *The Fairies are Thirsty* has entered history through the front door by evoking the québécois theatrical scandal of the century.

The scandal revolved on two levels: moral and literary. Virgin Mary's street language offended the clergy, indecent morality agitated the righteous. That Mary dared to speak, that the words themselves were subversive, and that audiences were allowed to witness her speech overthrew all limits of the patriarchal decorum. Judge for yourselves:

"I am the queen of the void . . . I am the priest's white marriage . . . I am the darkness of ignorance . . . I am the tool of powerlessness . . . I am the conjured image. I am the one who has no body. I am the one who never bleeds." (free translation)

Marguerite Duras:

Rigorous sensuality of writing. Its spell. Since *Les petits chevaux de Tarquinia* (1953), since her henceforth celebrated text for Resnais, *Hiroshima my love* and until *Agatha* (1981). Polyphonic sentences. Fragmented texts. Strange. Derived from news items. The genius of elliptical writing. Purifying the act of writing, according to Duras. The 'unspoken' of her characters. the 'out-text'. The anti-text, perhaps. "The seduction of words,"

Suzanne Lamy would say of Marguerite Duras. *Destroy, she says.* Write, we say. Write the desire, the fascination, the intelligence, the silences longer than the words.

Her female characters: Elisabeth Alione, Anne Desbaresdes, Lol V. Stein, Anne-Marie Stretter. Each one beautiful, mysterious, tragic. Like the writing of Duras.

During a stay in Montreal in 1981, she explained her relationship to writing for journalists: "One is not completely responsible for what she writes . . . There are things which happen, that come from the outside, those that cannot be analyzed, some which escape one, a sort of mutation which escapes one."

"Words have a power to proliferate infinitely," a power which no other medium will ever attain. The magic of words. Each reader's imagination multiplying a text infinitely. The words: multidimensional cinema without a screen. Contrary to popular belief, I think, like Duras, that "a word contains 1,000 images."

And again in 1981 she said: "One never writes alone."

There again I am in full agreement because when I write, there is a past which I feel rising up behind me. A past which is called: Sappho, Renée Vivien, Colette, Gertrude Stein, Marie-Claire Blais, Nicole Brossard . . . These women go before me. They follow me . . . in thought . . . over centuries. And I am not persuaded that it is "completely without my consciousness." (Duras) [All quotes from *Marguerite Duras à Montréal*, Éditions Spirale, 1981]

Nicole Brossard:

Speaking about Brossard, I remember her text in *Women and Words: The Anthology* just recently published. I quote:

"Symbolically and realistically, I believe that only women and lesbians will legitimize our path towards the origin of language and its future, of the sense that we make and will make happen in language."

(Free translation)

In more literary terms, it means that women "renew comparisons, establish new analogies, risk certain tautologies, certain paradoxes; it is rewriting 1,000 times her first phrase: 'a rose is a rose is a rose' . . . it is taking the risk of having too much and not enough to say." (Brossard)

It is becoming familiar again with the fact that the exact words

do not always come spontaneously. Especially if the words of self-expression do not exist. Even if they exist, it is still necessary to re/discover them and give them back their initial meaning. To strip them of their patriarchal connotations which are all too frequently far removed from the truth of women. You who have read Mary Daly will recognize this. Words are made to be deconstructed in order to be re/constructed.

Destruct, she says and re/construct. Yes indeed, this takes time, conviction and moral strength.

Although we may be able at this point to appreciate the progress made by women taking possession of the written word . . . in 10 years we will see more clearly these advancements. That we, women, have forcefully claimed our writing signifies that the of silence is over . . . albeit our stuttering preceding our self-affirmation. This being comfortable with our Selves, in our own words.

Re/claim the language:

Women writers with whom I feel more affinities are those who are re/discovering their mother tongue or their working language. If you have ever walked the streets on an annual basis (Reclaim the March night), you will understand the expression 're/claim the language'. Lest I be accused of sexism, I hasten to add that I am not aware of a male writer who works with words, who re/defines language quite in the same way women do.

Women are in the process of dis/covering our own identity, our own difference. Above all, we are fully and positively living this difference. Of course, in relation to man (op. cit.), woman is the Other (and here I think of the definition as given by Simone de Beauvoir). Even before the feminist movement attained its strength as we know it in 1985, you will agree with me that the Other was a minus.

Today, however, and always because of the feminist movement, Woman has become an entity in herself: she is Sameness, man of Otherness. Without, of course, any negative connotation. It is an established fact. Purely and simply.

This new perspective on the part of women explains perhaps, the fact that male writers are absent from this re/working, re/construction of the language by French and Québécoises writers and, to a lesser extent, by the Americans and English-speaking Canadians. In British Columbia I think of Betsy

Warland, Daphne Marlatt. In Manitoba I know of Lal Sarson and Milly Giesbrecht.

Women approach writing in the same way that they approach birth. We have spoken the Word of the Father . . . because we didn't know better; now that we know that a different language exists, we are learning it, we are claiming it. Literature will be the beneficiary.

In conclusion, I quote Maara Haas, who incidentally, will be publishing her second book with Lilith Publications next March:

"It's very important to have a woman's input because there's a decline in our literature. Women have fresh minds and concepts from their own experience, which has never been told in that way. For the revitalization of literature and for the sanity of those women, it's important to encourage them."

Translation in collaboration with Adena Franz